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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN CANDOR IN THE NATO-RUSSIA PREPCOM

Classified By: Political Advisor Kelly Degnan for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) A mid-level member of the Russian Mission to NATO struck a notable tone of candor by admitting that significant daylight existed between Moscow and the Russian Mission to NATO on improving the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) and focusing the organization on meaningful areas of cooperation. In response to questions from the U.S. and other Allies during an October 6 NRC Preparatory Committee meeting on restructuring, Second Secretary Anna Zakharchenko explained that the only instructions provided by Moscow on this topic were to stop eliminating any existing NRC committees or working groups and to push for the creation of a new working group on Afghanistan. In contrast, she said that the Russian Mission saw the benefits of restructuring and wanted to cooperate with other NRC members to make this a more effective forum producing tangible results. Allies received her candor positively, but were concerned that this situation could mean the NRC would once again move toward significant improvements only to have the exercise torpedoed at the last minute because the Russian Mission did not have Moscow's support.

¶2. (C) Zakharchenko explained to us on the margins that much of her Mission's problem stemmed from the difficulty in reaching consensus on the NRC within the Russian interagency. The MFA was more inclined to support closer cooperation with NATO, while the MOD and other bodies remained skeptical, thereby limiting Moscow's ability to transmit constructive instructions. We told Zakharchenko that the U.S. and other Allies were anxious to work with the Russian Mission to help convince Moscow that NRC restructuring would reinvigorate the organization and demonstrate that NATO and Russia were committed to effective political collaboration and practical cooperation.

¶3. (C) Comment: While we may receive cooperation from working-level Russian officials, Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozin remains the unknown factor in this equation, as we are not certain if he is included when our Russian interlocutors describe the views of their Mission. In contrast to Zakharchenko's candor, Rogozin stuck to the instructions received from Moscow during an October 5 informal NRC Ambassadorial, arguing for preserving all existing NRC working groups and creating a new Afghan group (septel). Convincing Rogozin of the need to accept NRC reform will be the real challenge, although even this may not be sufficient to bring Moscow on board as Rogozin's influence within the Russian foreign policy apparatus is questionable.  
DAALDER